

SMOKING LINK UNPROVEN

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Mayo Doctor Hits U. S. Stand on Lung Cancer

By BEN ZINSER

A Mayo Clinic doctor says the U. S. Public Health Service once attempted to produce lung cancer in experimental animals with cigarette smoke—and failed.

And the failure, criticizes Dr. Joseph Berkson, was not mentioned in the U. S. Surgeon General's warning to the American people that cigarette smoking may lead to lung cancer.

Dr. Berkson, a statistics expert at the famed Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., charges that the PHS's eight-page statement on smoking and lung cancer in the Journal of the American Medical Assn. three months ago is "inaccurate" throughout.

DR. LEROY E. BURNEY, "So far as I know," he surgeon general of the PHS adds, "the only experiment concluded in his statement on smoking in relation to that cigarette smoking is the lung cancer published from principal factor responsible the Public Health Service is for the increase in lung the negative experiment . . . and no work of this nature

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In a letter to the AMA is in progress now."

Journal, Dr. Berkson particularly criticizes Dr. Burney's statement in general, Dr. Berkson for "failure to cite the experiments performed in the

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PRESS TELEGRAM

Long Beach, California
March 20, 1960

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DR. LEROY BURNEY
His Report Attacked

scientific.

"If the Public Health Service believes that tobacco smoke contains chemical carcinogens (cancer-causing agents) that cause lung cancer, then the first task of its responsible scientists is to isolate these substances in 'pure culture' and to identify their chemical structure," he says.

"This is the first step required by Koch's postulates for demonstration of a causative agent of a disease," he adds. "It is furthermore the first step to be taken in order to use the discovery to amelioration of the disease."

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DR. BERKSON ALSO accused the PHS of not spending enough money on lung cancer research.

About 700 million dollars are appropriated annually to the PHS, he says, but "how much . . . has been spent for carrying out the first step to be taken to realize the discovery of an important cause of lung cancer?"

"So far as I can learn, none at all."

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"In particular," Dr. Berkson adds, "it contains some frank errors of omission and commission which are misleading with regard to the basic question at issue."

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THE MINNESOTA PHYSICIAN accuses the Public Health Service of not being

STAR

Terre Haute, Indiana
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SMOKING LINK DISPUTED

A Mayo Clinic scientist, in setting the record straight on interpretations of his remarks by Surgeon General Leroy E. Burney, on the relationship between tobacco and cancer, has added fresh salt to a wound which has been festering for a long time. His points, however, make more sense than most of the arguments heard on the subject.

In an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association Dr. Joseph Berkson of Mayo takes Dr. Burney to task for a previous article written by the federal health official. Dr. Berkson was quoted by the Surgeon General as noting "not only an association between smoking and lung cancer, but also to a wide variety of other diseases." What the Mayo scientist had noted, he said, is that "only about 14 per cent of the 'excess deaths' reflected in the higher rate of smokers compared to nonsmokers were due to lung cancer, while 86 per cent were due to causes other than lung cancer."

This hardly justifies a blanket condemnation of tobacco as the "principal" cause of cancer, as stated by Dr. Burney. This is only one point in the Burney article which has been disputed. The article in its entirety, says Dr. Berkson, "is characterized by an imprecision of language and thought that renders inaccurate almost every important point it deals with." As an additional example, he cites the statement that "non-smoking women have about the same lung cancer rate as non-smoking men."

"This, almost certainly, is not true," says Dr. Berkson. "The death rate for men is greater than that of women, not only for cancer of the lung but for cancer of almost every organ that is comparable in the two sexes, and for virtually every noncancerous disease also."

"The higher general mortality of the male than the female is characteristic of the entire animal kingdom. It is usually related by biologists to the presence of two chromosomes in the cell of the female and only one in the male, not to smoking."

Dr. Berkson's advice to the Public Health Service to publish facts, not beliefs, about health problems of consumer products is opportune. If, as he says, the service "believes that tobacco smoke contains chemicals which cause lung cancer, then the first task of its responsible scientists is to isolate these substances and identify their chemical structure."

Any "proof" short of this is mere opinion, and not well substantiated at that, except for the determined prejudice against a social habit.